



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Date: 05/18/07 at 15:00 PM

Place: USCG D17 Offices, Juneau, AK

Person Interviewed: Tim McCormick, Captain – Tug *Tiger*

Interview Conducted By: Liam LaRue, NTSB
Paul Webb, USCG

INTRODUCTION

Tim McCormick was interviewed in conjunction with the Marine Board of Investigation concerning the *M/V Empress of the North*. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from my handwritten notes of the conversation and is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and recollection.

INTERVIEW

- Captain of the Tug Tiger – there were 5 other guys with him – 2 mates, 1 engineer, 2 tankerman.
- At about 0130 on the morning of the grounding the mate came in and informed him that the Empress had run aground and they were taking on water.
- Tiger had just left Glacier Bay and heading eastbound in Icy Strait.
- He got up, went up to the wheelhouse and began to monitor the situation – at that time they were probably about an hour and a half from the Empress.
- He monitored 16 and listened to CG talking to Empress.
- Somewhere around 0200 or 0215 he called the CG and said they were in the area and offered assistance. He overheard the Empress talking about wanting to get passengers off – they had started to unload them onto a couple of fishing boats in the neighborhood.

- He called the CG and told them that they could take 15 to 20 comfortably inside the tug, and probably up to 50 on board if need be. As they got closer the Captain or Chief Mate on Empress suggested they load the passengers on the fishing boats onto the Tiger. The Evening Star and the Willow had passengers.
- First he tied up alongside his fuel barge – he informed everyone he had a fuel barge.
- The two fishing boats came over and unloaded a total of he thinks 47 passengers.
- Then the Capt. of the Empress called on the radio and asked if it would be faster to ferry passengers with the fishing boats or for the tiger to come alongside. He was 5 minutes from being alongside so he said he thought it would be faster to do that – so he worked his way over and got alongside. Empress put a ramp down.
- At that point the Liberty showed up. They had loaded about 20 more passengers onto the barge. The Liberty tied up on the other side and started taking passengers. Then they backed away and waited for the Columbia to get on scene.
- When the Columbia arrived the CG 41-footer ferried passengers over to it.
- They were very fortunate that the weather was good.
- The route they were on when the incident happened - they had left Glacier Bay after dropping fuel off at the park service lodge. When the mate woke him up they were around Point Adolphis heading Eastbound towards Chatham St. – then they would head east towards Point Baker.
- He believes they took a total of 75 passengers on to the Tug and Barge.
- Originally they had 69, but one of the passengers he had needed medicine out of their stateroom on the empress – when they went to get that they brought back 6 more at that time.
- Barge had diesel fuel, jet fuel, and unleaded. They had about 120,000 gallons total.
- When passengers were getting on from the fishing vessels he informed them that there would be no smoking or cell phone usage while on the tug and barge.
- He had the Captain on the Empress make an announcement that there would be no smoking or cell phones.
- If he had had any doubts about coming alongside the Empress, he wouldn't have done it. He wouldn't have jeopardized the crew, passengers, or equipment.
- All passengers were wearing life jackets. The life jackets were very uncomfortable for the elderly people. There were a lot of complaints.
- There were no issues transferring passengers from the fishing vessels or from the Empress.
- He has operated in the area for 25 years. Everything is so well marked in that area. He finds it hard to believe – if you make the turn around Couverdin, if you stay a mile off you are going to miss everything.
- He has cut between Couverdin and Rocky Island before – there is room in between there – about a half mile. If he has his barge up short and not a lot of product he'll cut that corner.
- If you go around Rocky Island there is a little 4-fathom spot so you have to keep about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of Rocky Island when you make the turn.

- Communication with CG went well except for when the helicopter was overhead he would bleed over on to every channel. He had to ask the CG to have the helicopter go silent for a few minutes while they were going alongside the Empress. He was using channel 67 to talk to his mate on the barge and every time the helicopter would transmit it would cover him up. Other than that communications were good.
- It was hard for him to tell if the Empress was listing because he never got behind or in front of it. He did hear the Empress inform the CG that he had steadied out at an 8-degree list. He heard that he had breached three void tanks in his double hull, then he thinks he heard something about water coming into crew quarters down below.
- It was a beautiful day – high overcast w/ unlimited visibility. Flat calm. When they started taking the first passengers on at about 0340, day was starting to break. It gets light at about 0400.

END OF INTERVIEW

Liam LaRue